

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT AND FINDING OF NO PRACTICABLE ALTERNATIVE

Removal of Airfield Obstructions Charleston Air Force Base

1. Pursuant to the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, the provisions of the National Environmental Policy Act (40 CFR Parts 1500-1508), and the Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process (32 CFR Part 989), the Air Force conducted an assessment of the potential environmental consequences of removing trees from the graded areas and clear zone at Charleston Air Force Base (CAFB), South Carolina. The environmental assessment (incorporated as an attachment to this finding) considered all potential impacts of the proposed action and alternatives, both as a solitary action and potentially in conjunction with other similar projects. This report summarizes the results of the evaluations of the proposed action and alternatives. It analyzes activities that have the potential to affect both the natural and human environment. This analysis summarizes the options evaluated and provides information explaining the need for the proposed action and its effect on human and natural resources.

2. Proposed Action:

- a.** The proposed action is the removal of trees in the Graded Area (GA), by land clearing 1500 feet out from the centerline and 1000 feet from the ends of runways in the GA (Runways 03, 33 and 15), the overstory removal of trees intruding in the Approach/Departure (A/D) and Transitional Zone (TZ) of the Clear Zones (CZs) at Runways 03, 33 and 15), and a “cut and leave” treatment west of the end of runway 03 at CAFB. Under this alternative, non-wetland areas within the GA will be grubbed, graded, seeded with grass (converted to turf) and grass height controlled. Jurisdictional wetlands within the GA will be subject to tree cutting and commercial harvest using Best Management Practices (BMPs) for logging in wetland areas, and followed up by periodic and selective herbicide treatment for undesirable species fast-growing and tall-growing species. A strip of trees along the northeastern side of Runway 15 within the graded will be subjected to the same treatment as described above for Runways 03 and 33.
- b.** Alternatives: The other two possible alternatives are as follows. The first involves completely draining, leveling, establishing turf throughout the graded area, and then selectively cutting trees intruding in the approach/departure and transitional surfaces of the clear zone by overstory removal and selective herbicide treatment. The second is conducting airlift-training exercises at another base, the closest of which is Shaw AFB near Sumter, South Carolina. Neither of these alternatives adequately met selection criteria as put forth in Section 2 of the attached Environmental Assessment.

With no practicable alternative to the proposed action as described above in a, the evaluation of the proposed action was limited to a comparison with the no action

alternative. The no action alternative is unacceptable. Without removal of airfield obstructions in the graded areas, and approach/departure and transitional surfaces of the clear zone, CAFB will be unable to continue its airlift mission, and the effectiveness of its mission and the training of its personnel will be seriously degraded. In addition, CAFB will not be in compliance with Air Force Manual (AFMAN) 32-1123(I), and Federal Aviation Administration Regulations (FAR), part 139.

3. Summary of Findings

a. Biological Resources:

- (1) *Upland Habitat in the Graded Areas of Runways 03, 33 and 15.* The proposed action will directly affect by conversion to turf approximately 94.6 acres of upland habitat covered with brush, young woodlands and open areas. Permanent impacts to the vegetation outside the graded area will be kept to a minimum. Any adverse impact on wildlife is expected to be short term as species relocate to new habitats. Existing habitat in the graded area will be irreversibly committed to this airfield obstruction removal project.
- (2) *Wetland Habitat in the Graded Areas Runways 03, 33 and 15.* The proposed action will directly affect approximately 47.4 acres of wetland by tree cutting and log removal using Best Management Practices for logging in South Carolina wetlands, followed up by selective herbicide for fast-growing and tall-growing tree species. Construction activities affecting wetlands will require that an individual 404(b) Clean Water Act permit be issued by the Army Corps of Engineers. Any impacts on wetlands will be mitigated through restoration of riparian wetlands and creation of vegetated buffers at CAFB and Hunley Park (former Navy property adjacent to the Dorchester gate at CAFB). The Charleston Army Corps of Engineers will determine the number of acres to be mitigated. No work will begin until the requisite permit 404(b) permit is obtained from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.
- (3) *Habitat in the Clear Zone outside Graded Area Runways 03 and 33.* The proposed action will directly affect approximately 261.8 acres in the CZ outside of the GA. A selective tree removal will be performed utilizing a forestry contractor. Selected trees will be marked for removal based on height and species criteria. The prescribed treatment would be aimed at manipulating the vegetation to promote slow-growing and low-stature tree or shrub species. Fast-growing/tall-growing species would be selectively removed, while more compatible low-growing and slow-growing species would be left. The intended result would be to establish a low-maintenance and self-sustaining vegetation cover under the A/D and transitional surfaces that remains low in stature, is compatible with airfield safety requirements, and remains aesthetically acceptable. Tree removal by commercial timber sale, conducted under the auspices of the Air Force Forestry Program, is feasible over most of this area.

However, land clearing and timber harvesting operations by traditional methods are not feasible in the area marked as 'Cut and Leave' on Figure 2.4b of the attached EA due to terrain limitations caused by previous strip-mining operations. In the approximately 14.2 acres of this strip-mined area, professional timber felling crews will be contracted to simply cut down offending trees and leave them in place.

- (4) *Endangered Species*. No state or federally listed, or candidate species were observed or anticipated to be found at the location of the proposed action, or CAFB as a whole. Consultation with the United States Fish and Wildlife Service confirmed that there are no known threatened or endangered species or species habitat at the proposed site.
- b. Cultural Resources: There are no documented historic or archaeological resources associated with the site chosen for the proposed action or CAFB as a whole.
- c. Solid/Hazardous Waste: The proposed action will not result in the generation of hazardous waste. The expected waste stream will consist of logging debris, which would be recycled at CAFB as mulch for landscaping.
- d. Air Emissions: The region is currently in attainment status. Logging activities and the use of logging equipment will cause a temporary increase in air emissions. The emissions that will be generated during the course of the project will not exceed the *de minimus* threshold triggering the requirement for an air conformity analysis under 40 Code of Federal Regulation Part 93, Subpart B.
- e. Noise: Noise levels in immediate proximity to the project would temporarily increase during the logging phase of the project. There are no sensitive receptors in the immediate proximity of the project area.
- f. Environmental Justice: With the exception of removing trees from the 47.4 acres of wetlands, all environmental impact will be limited to Pope AFB. There are no minority or low-income populations in the area of the proposed action, and thus, there will be no disproportionately high or adverse impacts on such populations.
- g. Cumulative Impacts: There are no proposed similar projects planned for CAFB that would add to the cumulative impacts of the proposed action on resources at CAFB.
- h. Relationship Between Short-term Uses and Enhancement of Long-term Productivity: Removing airfield obstructions at CAFB will ensure the installation is capable of meeting current and long-term training requirements and be in compliance with the requirements of AFMAN 32-1123(I) and the FAR, part 39.

- i. Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources: Implementation of the proposed action would irreversibly commit fuels, manpower and costs to the airfield obstruction removal project.

4. Practicable Alternatives: There is no practicable alternative to the proposed action. All other possible alternatives would fail to meet selection criteria as described in Section 2 of the attached EA.

5. Finding of No Significant Impact: Based upon my review of the facts and analyses contained in the attached environmental assessment conducted in accordance with the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act, the Council on Environmental Quality regulations, and Air Force Environmental Impact Analysis Process regulation 32 CFR 989, I conclude that the Proposed Action will not have a significant environmental impact, either by itself, or cumulatively with other ongoing projects at Charleston AFB. Accordingly, the requirements of NEPA, the regulations promulgated by the CEQ and 32 CFR 989 are fulfilled and an Environmental Impact Statement is not required. The ____ received a Notice of Availability on _____. Comments were or were not received on _____. The signing of this combined Finding of No Significant Impact and Finding of No Practicable Alternative (FONSI/FONPA) completes the environmental impact process under Air Force regulations.

6. Finding of No Practicable Alternative: Pursuant to Executive Order 11988, the authority delegated in SAFO 791.1 and taking the information contained in the attached environmental assessment into consideration, I find that there is no practicable alternative to constructing the proposed action in a wetland. The Proposed Action, as designed, includes all practicable measures to minimize harm. Before undertaking this action, **Pope** AFB officials will obtain the requisite individual Clean Water Act 404(b) wetlands permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

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(Environment, Safety and Occupational Health)